



NOAA FISHERIES

Office of Protected Resources

A “stranding” occurs when a marine mammal is either:

- Dead, whether found on the beach or floating in the water;
- Alive, on a beach, but unable to return to the water;
- Alive, on a beach, and in need of apparent medical attention; or
- Alive, in the water, and unable to return to its natural habitat without assistance.

Additional Information

For additional details, please refer to the 2018 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: United States.

All images were taken prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo (top): Cascadia Research Collective responds to a dead stranded gray whale on the outer coast of Washington. Photo: Cascadia Research Collective.



2018 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: West Coast Region

The U.S. Marine Mammal Stranding Response Network is comprised of more than 120 organizations that provide first response capabilities for cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) and pinnipeds (seals, and sea lions) that are sick, injured, in distress, in peril, or dead. These responses are authorized and overseen by NOAA Fisheries’ Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

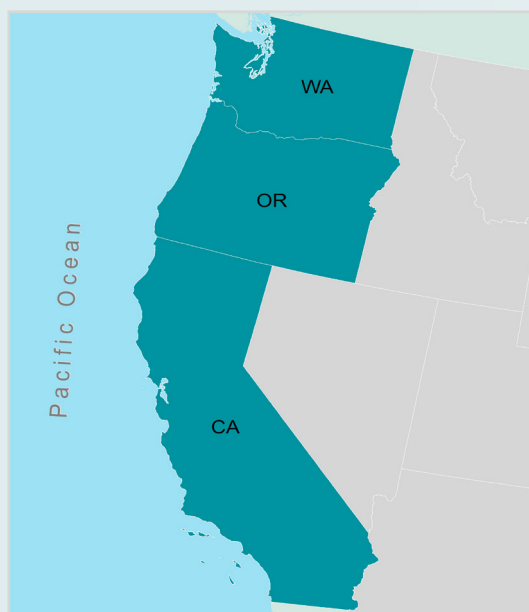


Figure WCR-1: NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region (WCR).

West Coast Region

The NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region stretches from Mexico to Canada and includes three coastal states (California, Oregon, and Washington). This region encompasses approximately 7,863 miles¹ of coastline and covers a range of diverse environments (Figure WCR-1). The region contains several large major cities (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle), busy ports and high traffic areas, in addition to a well visited coastline. The 3,514 confirmed marine mammal strandings in the West Coast Region in 2018 is similar to its 12-year (2006–2017) average ($n=4,061 \pm 1,392$).

¹ <https://coast.noaa.gov/data/docs/states/shorelines.pdf>

What Types of Marine Mammals Strand in the West Coast Region?

Forty-three different species of marine mammals can be found in the waters of the U.S. West Coast, and the majority of stranding reports involve pinnipeds (Figure WCR-2). Unlike other parts of the United States, this region has both seal and sea lion species. Common pinniped species include the California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*), harbor seal (*Phoca vitulina*), and northern elephant seal (*Mirounga angustirostris*) (Table WCR-1 and Figure WCR-3). Small cetacean species such as the harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), long-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus capensis*), short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*), and striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) also strand, although in much lower numbers. The region also has many large whale species including gray (*Eschrichtius robustus*), humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*), blue (*Balaenoptera musculus*), and sperm (*Physeter macrocephalus*) whales.

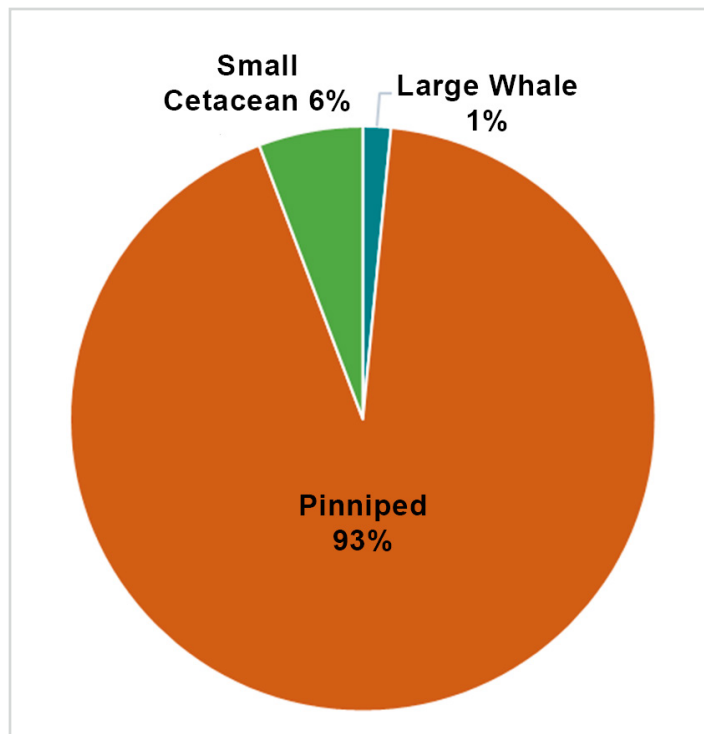


Figure WCR-2: West Coast Region marine mammal strandings, 2018 (n=3,514, including n=5 unknown cetaceans not shown).

Table WCR-1: Five most frequently stranded marine mammal species in the West Coast Region, 2018.

Species	Confirmed Stranding Reports 2018	12-Year Average \pm Standard Deviation ² (2006-2017)
California Sea Lion	1,853	2,346 \pm 1,201
Harbor Seal	718	724 \pm 125
Northern Elephant Seal	413	436 \pm 97
Harbor Porpoise	100	121 \pm 24
Steller Sea Lion	94	93 \pm 18

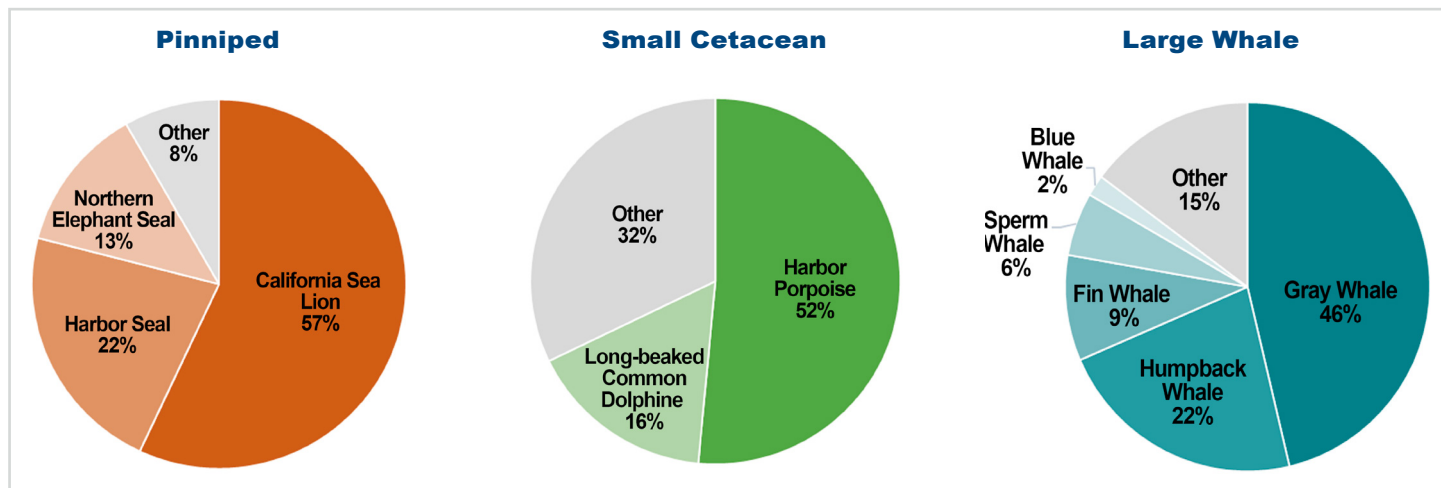


Figure WCR-3: West Coast Region marine mammal strandings, by species, 2018 (n=3,514). Pinniped (n=3,253), small cetacean (n=202), large whale (n=54), and unknown cetacean (n=5, not shown).

2 A standard deviation is a measure used to quantify the amount of variation within a set of values.

Species in the Spotlight



Southern Resident Killer Whale³ (*Orcinus orca*)

Southern resident killer whales are an endangered population, and one of NOAA Fisheries' "Species in the Spotlight." The population has shown ongoing decline in recent years, with only 77 individuals remaining.⁴ During the spring, summer, and fall, the range of Southern Resident killer whales includes coastal and inland waters of Washington State and the transboundary waters between the United States and Canada. This distribution is tied to the movements of the various runs of Chinook and other salmon. Despite increased management and recovery efforts (in both the United States and Canada), the Southern Resident killer whale population faces many threats including: depleted prey, disturbance from vessels and sound, and high levels of contaminants from pollutants. **In 2018, two Southern Resident killer whales were reported stranded to the West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network.** In August, NOAA Fisheries led emergency response activities for "J50," a young female Southern Resident killer whale that ultimately disappeared from the population, and "J35" who was observed carrying her dead calf over the course of two and a half weeks.⁵ For more information on the Species in the Spotlight initiative, please visit:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/endangered-species-conservation/species-spotlight-action-plan-accomplishments>



Photo (above): An emergency response intervention was conducted for "J50," a young Southern Resident killer whale that ultimately disappeared from the population. Photo: Katy Foster/The Whale Sanctuary Project.

³ All species illustrations are not to scale relative to each other.

⁴ https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/southern_resident_killer_whale_2018_final_sar.pdf

⁵ [Southern Resident Killer Whale Recovery: J50 and J35 Response](#)

When Did Marine Mammals in the West Coast Region Strand in 2018?

In 2018, the majority of pinnipeds to strand along the West Coast were pups and juveniles that stranded during pupping season, or directly after they weaned (March-May): Figure WCR-4. Causes of strandings typically included malnutrition, disease, separation from attending females, and human interaction. Malnutrition sometimes resulted from newly weaned pups not effectively foraging for food. The Stranding Network also responded to cetacean strandings year-round. The majority of harbor porpoise strandings happened in the summer months of July and August and occurred during, or right after, calving season. Strandings of some large whales (for example, the gray whale) coincided with their annual migration along the West Coast.

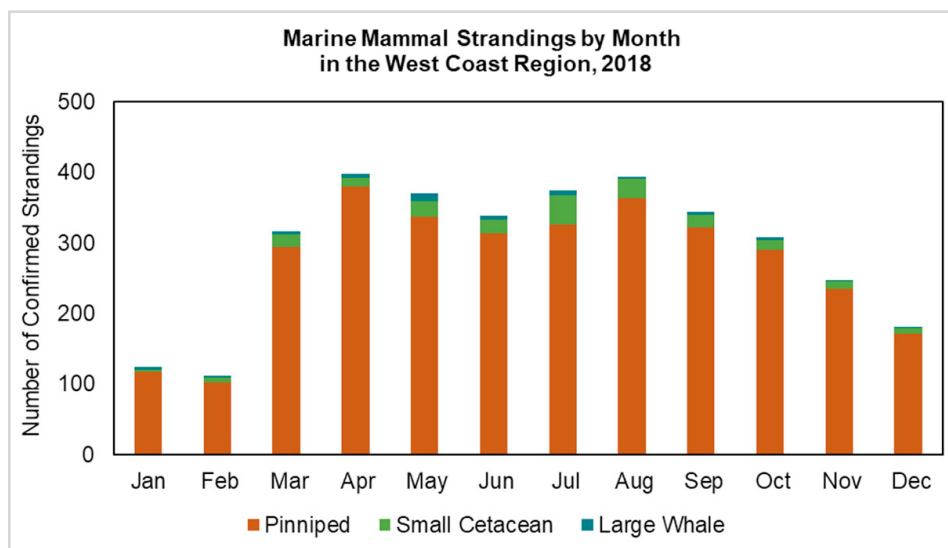


Figure WCR-4: Seasonality of marine mammal strandings in the West Coast Region, 2018.

Are Marine Mammals in the West Coast Region Stranding Alive or Dead?

A large proportion (56 percent) of pinnipeds documented by the West Coast Stranding Network in 2018 involved live animals (Figure WCR-5). Due to the high stranding rates of pups and yearlings, the network has developed differing response and rehabilitation capacities throughout the region. More live-stranded animals are reported in California, therefore the California network has developed more rehabilitation capacity compared to Washington and Oregon. Along the West Coast there are 11 facilities authorized for rehabilitation under a stranding agreement, and available to provide clinical care to a number of sick or injured marine mammals. Of the 1,483 animals transferred to rehabilitation facilities in 2018 (pinniped=1,478, small cetacean=5), 62 percent (n=917) were released.

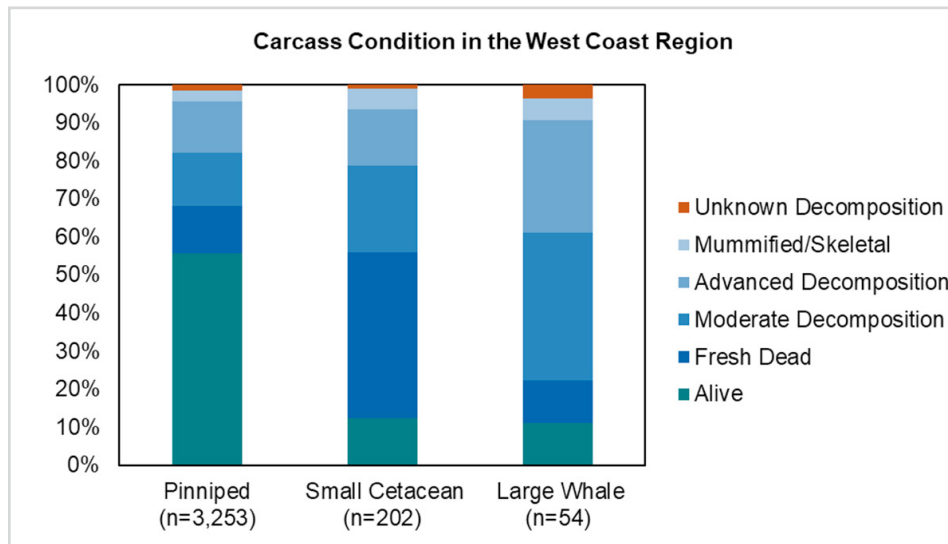


Figure WCR-5: The condition of stranded marine mammals on initial observation in the West Coast Region, 2018.

Photo (right): A moderately decomposed harbor porpoise in Port Ludlow, Washington. Photo: Port Townsend Marine Science Center.



What Types of Unusual Mortality Events Were Occurring in the West Coast Region?

There was one ongoing (previously declared) UME investigation in the West Coast Region in 2018:

Guadalupe Fur Seal UME



First Declared: 2015

Status in 2018: Ongoing

Number of new cases in 2018: 45

Total number of cases (2015–2018 combined): 282

Primary Causes and Findings: Ecological factors, primarily reduced or changed prey availability due to ocean heat events. Most seals that stranded were weaned pups and juveniles (< 2 years old), and showed signs of malnutrition

Locations of Cases: Pacific Ocean, California

Protected Status: Listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (throughout its range)

More information about UMEs is available at:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-unusual-mortality-events>



Photo (above): Release of two Guadalupe fur seals, with satellite tags attached to their back for post-release monitoring, following successful rehabilitation at The Marine Mammal Center. Photo: The Marine Mammal Center.

What Can Members of the Public Do?



A rehabilitated northern elephant seal is released at Drakes Beach in Point Reyes National Seashore. Photo: Bill Hunnewell/The Marine Mammal Center.



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OFFICIAL BUSINESS

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West Coast Regional 24/7 Hotline

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program relies on reports of stranded marine mammals by the public. If you come across a stranded marine mammal, please report it to your West Coast regional 24/7 hotline.

Hotline: (866) 767-6114

Report a Stranding

When reporting a stranded marine mammal, please include the following information:

- Date
- Location of stranding (including latitude and longitude)
- Number of animals
- Condition of the animal (alive or dead)
- Species (if known)

Photos or videos (from a safe and legal distance of 100 yards, unless greater restrictions apply) can also provide valuable information to Network responders. Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal. You can also download the Dolphin & Whale 911 Stranding App in the Apple Store to help report a stranding.

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Get Involved

The National Stranding Network relies on government, private, and public support to conduct its vital work to save animals in distress and understand causes of injuries and mortalities.

You can make a difference by contacting your local Stranding Network (list available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/report>) to see how you can get involved.

Only confirmed stranding activities involving species under the jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries (cetaceans and pinnipeds, except walrus) are included in this report. All data were obtained, analyzed, and validated from the NOAA Fisheries National Marine Mammal Stranding Database. Any duplicate events, and entries of entangled large whales, were removed from the following analyses. All data and information described within this report are correct as of September 22, 2020 (when the data query of the National Stranding Database was performed). All photographs were taken under Stranding Agreement, Section 109(h) authority, or NMFS research permits.